

Good morning Senator Bye, Rep Willis and members of the committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak. My name is Ana Bortolletto. I'm a resident of Danbury for over 13 years, an alumni of WCSU, and I'm also undocumented. I'm here in favor of Governor's Bill No. 6390, "An Act Concerning Access to Postsecondary Education." In particular, item 9 in the bill.

Being undocumented, I know from a firsthand experience what this In State Tuition provision would mean to students like me.

I walked the halls of DHS feeling that I was no different from my American classmates. But when college application time came around, I found out this was not the case. Unable to get financial aid, I knew that going to the college of my choice was going to be difficult. But I did not give up; my status did not stop me from working hard in high school. Like many others in my situation, I was a straight A student, in honors and AP classes and regularly did community service. I graduated in the top 5% of my class. After graduation, I ended up going to WCSU, it was the only school my parents could afford, and even that was a struggle, especially because my sister and I went to college at the same time, and it is not a good feeling to feel guilty about getting a higher education.

I remember when I found out I was classified as an out of state student and had to pay out of state tuition, I only found this out after I had already registered for my classes, so when the bill came, it was quite a surprise. It didn't make sense to me, I thought they had made a mistake, I didn't understand why I had to pay the out of state tuition; in my mind I was not an out of state student. I went into the admissions office and asked "how can this be? How can I be an out of state student when I've lived in Danbury, where WCSU is, for 9 years? When I finished elementary school here, went through middle school and graduated from Danbury HS, when my parents have played taxes all these years to the state?" I offered to bring them 9 years of utility bills, 9 years of income taxes receipts, anything that could prove what I already knew, that I was a resident of Connecticut. But all they told me was that until I bring proof of my legal status, there was nothing they could do. I was being denied acceptance and membership in the community I had grown up in, the community I felt I belonged to, because I didn't have the right piece of paper.

It is important to note that undocumented students do not qualify for financial aid, federal loans or most scholarships, and this bill would do nothing to change that. Much is made of a supposed revenue loss that will occur if these students start paying in state tuition. However, because these students do not qualify for financial aid, few, if any are able to currently afford to pay out of state tuition. For example, at WCSU In State Tuition is \$4,451, while out of state is \$9,634. I want to highlight that the choice these students have is not between paying out of state or paying in state tuition, it's between paying in state tuition and not paying any tuition at all. Therefore, by opposing this bill, you are not safeguarding school's tuition revenue, the only thing you are doing is denying access to education to some of our state's brightest students, all you are doing is telling these kids that after living most of their lives in this state, after contributing to their community, you are telling them they don't belong here, marginalizing them and relegating them to a life in the shadows, denying them a sense of hope and community, telling them to give up on their dreams of higher education and social mobility. You are wasting their talents and their dreams, and punishing them because of a situation they find themselves in through no fault of their own, punishing them for a choice they did not make.

When you are considering this bill, I urge you to remember that an uneducated person is more likely to be a drain on society, more likely to end up in prison and more likely to take advantage of public benefits, while an educated person gives back to the community.

Unlike most undocumented students, I was able to go to college, and I'm here today as a college graduate. And I would not sit here before you today if I had not gone to college, because a college education has given me opportunities and opened doors for me. It has allowed me to plan for my future, allowed me to have a future and see that there is a future for me, allowed me to see that my life is not a waste, that there is a place for me in Connecticut as a contributing member of society, despite my status. This is because Education is key to social mobility and advancement.

Further, Governor Bill 1011, which reorganizes the state's higher education system, explicitly says that the state's higher education strategic plan shall "improve access to higher education for minorities and nontraditional students, including, but not limited to, part-time students, incumbent workers, adult learners, former inmates and immigrants"

I urge you to support this narrow bill, which at its core is based on the principles of equality and meritocracy that this nation was founded upon.